

Last Judgment Sunday November 12, 2017

Matthew 25:31–46 (EHV) – ³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶I was lacking clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or lacking clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰“The King will answer them, ‘Amen I tell you: Just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.’ ⁴¹“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you did not give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you did not give me anything to drink. ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, lacking clothes and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not take care of me.’ ⁴⁴“Then they will also answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or lacking clothes or sick or in prison and did not serve you?’ ⁴⁵“At that time he will answer them, ‘Amen I tell you: Just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.’ ⁴⁶And they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Introduction

I’ll say some names, you figure out which TV show they’re from. Rusty. Doug Luellen. Judge Wapner. Do you have it yet? For those of us who lived in the glorious decade of the 80s, who could ever forget those words heard day after day, **“These parties have dismissed their court cases to have their case heard here, in our forum, The People’s Court.”** This was the first show that brought the courtroom into our living rooms. It was better entertainment than a soap opera for some people. The cases were often unbelievable. And the attraction’s still there, isn’t it? Whether it’s Judy or Brown, Mathis or Milian, Court TV is a bizarre form of entertainment.

Theme: God’s Court Is Now in Session.

It’s easy for us to flip on the TV and watch the outcome of various court cases or read in the newspaper how someone else was sentenced. But as we near the end of the church year, the lessons emphasize that we ourselves will soon participate in a trial. In fact, we’re going to be the ones on trial. In our sermon text Jesus tells us, **GOD’S COURT IS NOW IN SESSION. Rise in honor of the Judge. Look closely at the evidence. And listen carefully to the verdict.**

Part I: Rise in honor of the Judge.

As Judgment Day approaches, we’ll want to know a little bit about the courtroom and the Judge.

The Bible tells us that this particular court date is going to occur on the last day. And just when that day will be is one of the most sought after questions of all. From the Mayans to modern day ministers, many have gestimated – or even given a specific date on the calendar. But only God knows when the final hour of this present world will be. In the meantime – even though we’re not sure *when* Judgment Day will be – we *can* be sure of one thing. It’s coming. In our text, Jesus doesn’t say “if” he comes, he says, “when.” Judgment Day will happen whether people are ready for it or not. It’ll come like a thief in the night. That’s why Jesus regularly urges his followers to “watch” and “be ready.”

According to Jesus, there's a throne in the courtroom instead of a bench. We're reminded that the judge is also royalty. He's a king. He occupies a position of honor and majesty. He's the ruler of all. No one can claim any authority over him. He need not answer to anyone. This throne also symbolizes justice. The person who sits on it can't make a faulty judgment. Only truth and complete justice can come from it.

And finally, there will be defendants in this courtroom. Jesus says that **"all the nations will be gathered in his presence."** The judgment won't be withheld from anyone – past, present, or future – from Adam, the first human being, to all who are still alive on that day. The judgment will be public – in the sight and hearing of every human being that ever lived. Here Jesus also states that the defendants will be divided into two groups. Just as in an earthly courtroom, some people will be seated on the left and some on the right.

Enter the Judge. The first thing we hear about him is that he's the **"Son of Man."** Here, as in several other places, Jesus refers to himself. The Judge is the very Son of God who became man. Just as all human beings are under the law, so Jesus also placed himself under the law. But if Jesus himself a human, what makes him qualified to judge other humans? The answer, of course, is that Jesus was the only person who kept that law perfectly. He's like no other. Only the completely just Son of God could proclaim complete justice.

This Son of Man will come **"in his glory."** Remember what the two angels told the disciples after the ascension: **"This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way."** He'll come on the clouds in majesty, **"all the angels with him"** as his attendants. The apostle John gives us a picture of this in his Revelation, **"Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man. He had a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand."**

He'll come as promised. Through all sorts of lessons and parables, Jesus promised that he'd return again as the righteous Judge. We trust in that promise as we proclaim week after week in the creed, **"From there he will come to judge the living and the dead."**

Christ, the Judge, will come possessing some very important characteristics. He'll be completely holy and just. He'll make no errors in dispensing his judgment. There will be no chance for appeals. He'll enter the courtroom with omniscience. There will be no need for a defense attorney. No need for a prosecutor. No jury. No witnesses. He'll know everything there is to know.

If that was everything Jesus told us, Judgment Day would be a scary day, indeed! But in our text, he reassures us by comparing himself to a shepherd. The same shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep. The same one about whom David writes, **"He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness. I will fear no evil, for you are with me."** That's why Christians don't need to fear Judgment Day. It's our own Savior who died for us on the cross who's our judge. By this act, he took all our sins on himself and credited us with his righteousness. Even though our Judge is completely holy, at the same time, he's Love itself.

Transition

Now that the Judge is seated on his throne, let's look closely at the evidence of every individual person.

Part II: Look closely at the evidence.

Just as the law of the land is the standard in an earthly trial, so will the law be used as the standard in God's courtroom. That law is God's holy will for mankind. **"Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself."** It's according to this law of love that all people will be judged publicly. In our text, Jesus especially speaks of the second table, dealing with other people. If people are hungry or thirsty or naked, give them food or drink or clothing. If people need shelter, provide for them. If people are in prison, visit them. If people are sick, take care of them.

And there can only be two responses to God's law – keep it or disobey it. We see in our own lives that we haven't kept God's law. We've broken every single one of his commandments many times over. We know – and God knows – that we deserve only hell. But thankfully, the evidence in this trial isn't whether or not we've kept God's law, but rather how we've displayed our faith – or for some people, their lack of it.

On one hand, Christians will show abundant evidence of their faith. They believe that Christ has removed their sins by paying for them on the cross. They believe that there's nothing they can do but trust by the faith that's been given to them that Christ has done it all. And the faith of these believers is naturally going to produce fruit. A believer will thankfully seek to do what God asks of him. He'll do his best to provide for the brother in need. He'll offer his help whether he's asked or not. Of course, Christ doesn't just look at the action itself, but also at the attitude. These people on the right side of the judge ask with amazement, **"When did I do all this for you?"** They can't believe that Christ used lowly sinners to do good works.

And then, there are those on the left. They're also shown the evidence. But this time the evidence is of their lack of faith. Jesus died for these people too, but they didn't believe it. They rejected their only chance at salvation. Unbelievers can't perform a single good work. On the outside they try to make themselves look good, but in God's eyes, they're self-righteous. They don't take the time to help others, but only serve themselves. Their attitude is the exact opposite when they're confronted by Christ. They aren't amazed, but get defensive. They ask Christ, "Hey, wait a minute. **When did we see you needing help?** If you would've shown up at our door, of course we would've helped you." When Jesus says that all these things were done (or not done) to him, we're reminded that whenever a person provides for someone else – no matter how insignificant it might seem – Christ takes it personally that it was done to him.

Transition

Now that the evidence has been heard, let's listen carefully as the Judge makes his verdict known.

Part III: Listen carefully to the verdict.

Actually in our text there are two different verdicts. The first one occurs right in the beginning as the Shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The righteous sheep are placed on his right and the cursed goats on his left.

The second verdict is Christ's public pronouncement of judgment. He welcomes the sheep to take the inheritance that's been given to them as a gift. Heaven was prepared for them from the beginning of the world. The goats, on the other hand, are condemned. Christ tells them to depart into the eternal fires of hell to suffer with the devil and his evil angels.

And this verdict will be put into effect immediately. The unbelievers will go to hell because they rejected God's gift of salvation. The believers will enter eternal life in heaven because Christ won a place for them there and the Holy Spirit worked faith in their hearts. Of course this wasn't because of their good works, but because of Christ's GOOD WORK. Heaven is their inheritance because they were made holy by the blood of Jesus.

Conclusion

Yes, Judgment Day is coming. We don't know when, but we do know it'll happen. And on that day, we'll all be put on the stand. Christ will ask you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" As you look back at all your shortcomings, don't fall into despair, but boldly say, "Because I'm holy in your sight. I'm holy because you've clothed me with your holiness." So we joyfully pray: Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.